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THE STORY OF LAMENNAIS

There are no more poignant and moving episodes in Ecclesiastical history than the ruined lives and blasted careers of those former champions, who fell away from the Faith, reviled the Creed which they once had loved, and vilified the chiefs, whom they had once obeyed. And again and again the importunate questions force themselves on the musing mind: What was the real reason of their unexpected defection? Did circumstances excuse or palliate their conduct in any way? If they had been blessed with some wise and sympathetic friend to restrain and mother them; if some loving and skillful hand had been present to pour balm into their storm-swept hearts; if only authority had pressed its rights a little less vigorously; if above all opponents had been less eager to triumph out of their humiliation, might not the sordid and dreadful tragedy have been changed into a charming idyl?

So fallen! so lost! the light withdrawn
Which once he wore;
The glory from his grey hairs gone
For evermore.

Reville him not! The tempter hath
A snare for all;
And pitying tears, not scorn and wrath,
Befit his fall!

Of all we loved and honoured, naught
Save power remains;
A fallen angel's pride of thought
Still strong in chains.

If, for instance, Tertullian could have been weaned from his harsh and overbearing dogmatism; if Arius could have been distracted from his mania for unwise speculation; if Nestorius could have been persuaded to attend to his vast and half-pagan diocese; if all the welter of leaders and sects, that distracted the

¹ So he always signed himself from 1834, the date of his rupture with the Church.

East from the fourth to the eighth centuries had directed their energies into missionary work, charitable endeavor, zeal for souls, what a glorious expansion the Church would have achieved! Is it likely that the Greek Church would have become petrified into sterile immobility, or the whole Eastern Empire have fallen such an easy prey to Islamism? But in the midst of disputes inextricably entangled, in the East at least, with base politics and court intrigue; when empresses and chamberlains and more frequently still eunuchs dictated the decrees of synods and assemblies, how could the Church prosper, or true religion flourish, or noble enterprises of grand conception be safely piloted to successful issues?² Oh, Iago, the pity of it!

These thoughts have been suggested to us by the mournful career of a priest, who was hailed in the earlier half of his life as a new Father of the Church, but who died outside the pale, and deliberately refused the Sacraments in his last conscious moments.

Félicité Robert de La Mennais, who after 1834 wrote his name invariably Lamennais, was born at St. Malo in Brittany in 1782. His father, an unsuccessful merchant, was too much preoccupied with business worries to attend to his family. His mother died when the boy was only five. His brothers and sisters, of whom there were four and one of whom, Jean-Marie, was to grow into a real authentic saint, seem to have been without interest for him; for he wrote in after years that ennui was born in the home circle on a winter's evening. He was of an extremely nervous and sickly constitution, irritable, cranky, and easily excited to furious outbursts of anger, which expired as quickly as they were born. Félicité's greatest pleasure was to divide his time between long dreamy walks by the seashore, eager gallops over the surrounding moors, and unrestrained reading in his uncle's library. This uncle had invented confinement in the library as a punishment for his nephew's pranks but the culprit found himself so much at home, that he sought out and multiplied occasions of condemnation. The wilful boy left to his own devices among teeming books read not wisely but too well—read so unwisely that he completely lost his faith; and when at eighteen a priest

² See a very curious paper by Batiffol entitled *Les Présents de S. Cyrille à la cour de Constantinople. Études de Liturgie*, 154 seqq.

strove to prepare him for his First Communion there was no possibility of stopping the interminable arguments or quelling the unbelief of the young infidel. At twenty-two, however, he again got back or won back his faith, and it is not clearly known who or what exercised a determining influence over him. One thing is certain, that his elder brother, Jean-Marie, a priest since 1801, and Felicité became at this time (1804) fast friends, and they engaged in literary work together. They produced thus in collaboration *Reflexions sur l'état de l'église de France* and in 1808 *Tradition sur l'institution des évêques en France*. This latter pamphlet was not published until the last years of Napoleon's reign, and it gave such offense to the Government that the author thought it advisable to leave home, and spend some time in England. There he taught mathematics at a school in Kensington kept by a certain Abbé Carron, perfected himself in English, which he already knew fairly well, and acquired a passion for Milton, which with a similar one for Dante he kept all his life long. In later years when living at his home of Chenaie at the height of his fame and surrounded by admiring followers, it was his delight to expound the beauties of these two great poets to his youthful disciples. Abbé Carron acquired a deep influence over his assistant, advised him to enter the priesthood, and dissipated the doubts, fears and hesitations which the neophyte cherished on this venture. For, though he had received tonsure as far back as 1809, he recoiled before subdeaconship until 1815. On December 14th of that year he made the decisive step, and writing the very next day to his brother he said it has cost him a tremendous sacrifice. On March 9th, 1816, he was ordained priest, and his first mass was a terrible ordeal both for himself and those present.³ His face became livid, the sweat poured from him, and

³ MOURRET, *La Question du libéralisme catholique in the Revue d'apologétique*, février I 1917. p. 520: an identical or very similar account appears in biographies generally. But a notable extract published for the first time in *Le Correspondant* of December 25, 1920, p. 1115 gives a different history of this first mass from the lips of Lamennais himself, so at least the author of the extract a certain M. Dargaud alleges. "One day at Juilly speaking to the Abbé de Salinis, pray for me, pray for me he [Lamennais] repeated to him, I need prayers badly. My first mass disturbed me terribly, and disturbs me still. I was alone. In order to be more recollected I had allowed in only one little peasant altar boy. In the middle of this mass I distinctly heard a voice which uttered these words clearly near me: Carry your cross, always, always. Well said the Abbé de Salinis, that was a great favour, which you should be very glad of. Surely, replied M. de la Mennais, but I am weary of carrying this cross, and I am growing more and more weary. Pray then for me with all your heart."

the assistants thought the ceremony would never end. Three months later his mental anguish was still acute. Writing to his brother on June 25th, 1816, he said: "I must now strive to make the best of things, and if possible, lull myself to sleep under the stake to which I have been chained." Still he did not allow his doubts or scruples to interfere with his literary activity. For he began immediately to write in various newspapers, and he at once made his mark. He had all the qualities that go to make a first-class journalist, vividness, alertness, the telling word, the arresting phrase, the striking presentation, the rich, full-blooded development. He had other gifts also, useful no doubt, but whose employment needs unceasing care and vigorous pruning and repression—these were sarcasm, satire, the scorn of opponents, the art of affixing stinging epithets, which pilloried sometimes unjustly enough, their object and victim. De Maistre, then at the height of his fame, wrote to him: "Don't waste your talent. Nature has given you a cannon. Don't change it into a shot-gun to kill sparrows." He certainly did not do so; but it had been well for himself if he had toned down somewhat his polemic vigour, and especially if he had been less outrageous and offensive towards his opponents. Amongst his wisest friends and best advisers was a young Sulpician priest, Abbé Tesseyre, who in 1817 suggested his writing a continuation and supplement to Chateaubriand's *Genius of Christianity* under the wider title of the *Spirit of Christianity*. This project never materialized but its propylaeum and facade, so to speak, saw the light in 1817 under the title: *Essai sur l'indifference en matière de religion*. This work roused France like a trumpet call, and in an astonishingly short time 40,000 copies were sold. Not for seventy-six years, says Lacordaire, had any priest in France proved himself a writer of eminence or a superior man. But here the oldtime Christian eloquence, with now and then perhaps a note of harshness, vibrated. Enthusiasm and gratitude mounted to the highest pitch; the truth had waited so long for an avenger! And M. de la Mennais, unknown the day before found himself possessed of the prestige of Bossuet.⁴ Lacordaire adds that all Eu-

⁴ LACORDAIRE. *Considerations sur le système de M. de la Mennais*. Ch. I. pp. 35-37.

rope awaited the continuation of the work. There was some delay in this; a second installment not appearing until 1820 and a third in 1821. The disappointment provoked by these later volumes was almost as great as the admiration which had been excited by the first. They grappled with the problems of certitude and the motives of belief. They abandoned the age-long positions of Catholic philosophy, they abandoned the natural light of the intelligence to place the ultimate foundation of certitude in the consent of the human race.⁵ All the Sulpicians, all the seminaries of France protested, and many of the bishops also openly opposed his theses. Abbé Carron implored him to publish nothing more on such very delicate matters without first consulting trained and expert theologians. This advice was most disagreeable to him, and he intimated to his correspondent that if his ideas were condemned by Rome he would write more.⁶ Rome, however, took no notice of the controversy and he was not condemned. If contradiction beset him, ardent sympathy and devotion also concentrated around him, and Lamennais became henceforward the leader of a school with his warm admirers and his no less passionate opponents. He gathered around him men of the highest and rarest gifts, who afterwards gained name and fame for themselves both in the Church and in the world—Gerbet, Rohrbacher, Lacordaire, Gueranger, Montalembert, de Salinis, Maurice de Guérin and others became the guests of Lamennais in his home of Chenaie, and there they worked at various literary tasks and dreamed of social and religious regeneration together. Another project of his to which he gave some expression during this period was the formation of a religious order, entitled *la Congregation de Saint-Pierre*, whose aim was to work for "the regeneration of the world." During these years also aided to some extent by his brother, Lamennais produced a new translation of the *Imitation of Christ* accompanied with reflexions of his own. This work has been used and admired by three generations, and still maintains its ground; it was pronounced by de Sacy to be a masterpiece both of the writer and the priest. He visited Rome in 1824, was received with the most flattering distinction by Pope Leo XII, who offered him an

⁵ MERCIER, *Criteriologie*, p. 127 seq.

⁶ FOISSET, *Vie du P. Lacordaire* Vol. I, p. 110.

apartment in the Vatican, and hung Lamennais' portrait in his private cabinet. Towards 1828 this same Pope is said to have selected Lamennais for the cardinalate. In full Consistory, the Pontiff declared cardinal *in petto*, "a distinguished writer, whose works had not only rendered eminent services to religion, but had rejoiced and astonished Europe." Cardinal Wiseman, who tells this episode in his *Recollections of the last Four Popes*, admits these words apply more fitly to Lamennais than to anyone else; but some maintain that the person meant by the Pope was Dr. John Lingard, whose histories were then being widely read on the Continent. However that may be, these impending honours, the exaggerated deference of his disciples, the extraordinary sway that he exerted over public opinion in France did not inspire in him any salutary humility, any prudent distrust of his own powers and opinions. On the contrary he seems to have allowed himself to be regarded as an oracle, to have imagined that he and his were the only ones capable of regenerating their country and their Church; and to have become soured, embittered, furiously indignant at any kind of opposition or even difference of opinion. Lacordaire in the memoir of his own life which he dictated on his death bed describes the first visit he made to Chenaie in 1830, and his amazement at "the kind of idolatry" which was paid to the Master.⁷ An atmosphere of adulation is unhealthy for anyone; to some it is a deadly poison. It warps their entire being; it jaundices their whole outlook; it obsesses them with the conviction of their own infallibility, rectitude and necessity. Let then authority make a ruling adverse to their views, and demand from them submission and obedience; let discipline call for a change of tactics and procedure; let prudence and common sense suggest the abandonment of untenable positions, or the quelling of exasperating controversies and unprofitable fault-finding. At once the storm of revolt rises in their souls; at

⁷ The history of humanism is full of similar fantastic adoration paid sometimes to real and not infrequently to affected excellence. Here is a parallel instance from modern times. The writer in question is Swinburne, the narrator Edmund Gosse. "While the present writer [Edmund Gosse] was still in that outer class, he well remembers being told that an audience of the elect to whom Swinburne recited the yet unpublished "DOLORES" had been moved to such incredible ecstasy by it that several of them had sunk on their knees, then and there, and adored him as a god."

Edmond Gosse, *Portraits and Sketches*, pp. 3-4.

once wounded pride and petulance stiffen their resistance; at once the pampered, caressed ego cries out that they owe it to themselves, to their past, to their achievements, to their career, to the world watching their every move and variation not to deviate a hair's breadth from the attitude they have adopted. So it happened with Lamennais when the campaign of the *Avenir* brought down on him the censures of the French bishops and the condemnation of the Pope.

In September, 1830, a young layman, to-day completely forgotten, Harel du Tancrel, mainly with his own means and in the humblest manner imaginable, started a Catholic paper, to which he gave the significant name of *L'Avenir*, the Future. May he not have felt some premonition, that only in the distant future would the seed sown by the *Avenir* bring forth full fruit? His principal supporter in this venture was the Abbé Gerbet, who enlisted the help of Lamennais. This last at once eclipsed all his co-workers, the direction and editorship of the sheet fell as it were spontaneously into his hands, so that it is no exaggeration to say that *L'Avenir* was Lamennais. The first issue of the paper appeared on October 16, 1830; very soon it counted 3,000 subscribers. Its championship of the Church and every worthy cause was vibrant, inspiring; it told the truth boldly and without any attenuation; and this chevaleresque attitude and fearless campaigning, at that time practically without precedent in the European press, conciliated sympathy and brought every day new and enthusiastic adherents. In the issue of November 25, Lacordaire, who was beginning to manifest unrivaled journalistic gifts,⁸ urged the bishops to reject the episcopal nominations made by King Louis-Phillipe; while Lamennais wrote an indignant article on the petty tyranny exercised against Catholics. The Government indicted both writers, who were brought to trial and acquitted. To cover their law expenses they had called for a public subscription, which soon reached the relatively large sum of \$5,000. This unexpected success inspired Lamennais

⁸ It is worth while noting that of all the writers in the *Avenir* Lacordaire was the most violent. Lamennais in spite of his own shortcomings in this respect thought that Lacordaire went beyond the limit, and he often said speaking freely to his entourage: "This fellow's exaggerations will ruin us." (Les exagérations de ce garçon-la nous perdront.) FAYRE, *Lacordaire Orateur*, p. 103.

with the idea of forming an association for defending Catholic rights and protecting Catholic interests. They collected \$4,000 to start this organization under the title of *Agence général pour la défense de la liberté religieuse*. Nor did their zeal and charity remain confined to themselves. Then as now Ireland was in deep distress, and Lamennais and his co-workers collected no less than \$16,000 for the relief of the Irish poor.⁹ Meanwhile another member of the little band, C. de Coux, treated social and economic questions in the columns of the journal in a thoroughly competent manner, still without any perilous exaggeration. Flushed with triumph the writers of the *Avenir* now began to tread on dangerous ground, and to put into their language a severity, and into their views an untried utopianism which to say the least was most imprudent. Thus they demanded the immediate separation of Church and State; and that the Church surrender instantly the salaries paid to her officials by the Government. To ask such a radical sacrifice immediately was most unreasonable; and to do so, without first consulting the bishops and the Holy See was contrary to all subordination and discipline. The paper further gave grave offense by proning incessantly the rights of the people to self-government, and that the day of autocracy and absolutism was over. The sovereigns and rulers of the time could hardly be expected to accept with good grace such a very revolutionary doctrine. The cup of its iniquities literally flowed over when the *Avenir* strove to unite in one mighty federation not only the Catholics of France, Belgium, Ireland, Poland and Germany; but also the "liberals," or as we should say, the democrats of every country. In the country still strewn with the ruins of the French Revolution, in the society still bleeding from its wounds, such a policy was looked upon as atrocious, and in the storm of disapprobation that ensued the *Avenir* foundered. On November 11, 1831, the shareholders decided unanimously that it was imperative to suspend publication, at least for a time. On November 15, 1831, the paper made its last bow, and announced that three members of the staff, the Abbés Lamennais and Lacordaire and the Count de Montalembert would proceed immediately to Rome, "the pilgrims of God and of lib-

⁹ LACORDAIRE. *Notice dictée sur son lit de mort*, in *Lettres à Théophile Foisset*, Vol. I. p. XXXIX.

erty" to submit their views to the judgment of the Holy See. The idea was Lacordaire's, who blamed the move severely afterwards, and blamed Lamennais also with his twenty years seniority and mature experience of life for not dissuading him from it.¹⁰ It is easy to be wise after the event, and to see how much better one might have ordered one's methods. But to them in the stress of strife and contradiction the pilgrimage to Rome seemed a leap into the shining heights of the ideal, and a triumphant escape from the dead and flat prose of failure. Who can blame the soldier for laying his sword at his chieftain's feet? and if he points a little wistfully to his wounds and sacrifices, and thus mutely solicits some reward, who would have the heart to condemn him? So speaks the language of exaltation and enthusiasm, but cool reflexion and hard reality cannot fail to see many other and varying viewpoints. The Pope as head of a world-wide organization must promote the interests of the Church Universal, he dare not permit himself to become the narrow champion of one part or section to the detriment of the whole. Now no one connected with the *Avenir* except Lamennais was, up to that time, in any way famous. Even he, for some years past, had been criticized severely, and his views had met with powerful opposition. But granted that he were an Augustine or a Bossuet, which he was not—granted that his views were technically flawless, which they were not—still the Pope might well hesitate to approve formally doctrines which the majority of the French episcopate detested; and the very most that could have been expected of him was to pass over in silence aims and methods which had set the whole country aflame. It seems the Pope was desirous and more than desirous to leave things as they were. Gregory XVI no more wanted to condemn Lamennais than Innocent XII wanted to condemn Fénelon. He was not prepared and could not reasonably be expected to back with his approval firebrand methods and theories, which were inopportune, ill-timed and quite debatable. The pilgrims reached Rome; they found no one of any importance to meet them, only a French priest, Abbé Martin de Noirliu, who offered them hospitality in the name of Father Ventura, the superior-general of the Theatines. Their request for an audience with the Pope was quietly

¹⁰ LACORDAIRE, *Notice sur son lit de mort*, pp. 11, 41.

adjourned until they had given a statement in writing of their desires and intentions.¹¹ This statement was from the pen of Lacordaire. The Pope read it carefully and more than once. He replied through Cardinal Pacca that while fully appreciating their intentions and their talents His Holiness was not pleased with the discussion of dangerous controversies; that their opinions would be carefully examined, but such an examination would require time and that he thought it advisable for them in the meantime to return to their own country. The Pope also granted them a private audience, received them most kindly, but he had stipulated beforehand that no mention of the controversy should be made in his presence.

Some time previous to this visit the Pope had taken care to learn something of Lamennais, his aims and theories. With this object the Pontiff had consulted three persons. Their written replies buried for decades in the Vatican archives were first published in 1911, by Father Dudon, S.J.¹² The three persons consulted were Father Ventura, Cardinal Lambruschini, and Abbate Baraldi, a priest of Modena, who had founded a Catholic review himself and frequently spoken of Lamennais' writings with respect and sympathy. Ventura thought that Lamennais was an extraordinary genius, but that many of his views were dangerous, and no written approbation should be given of his doctrines. Lambruschini was of opinion that no reply at all should be given to Lamennais. His object in coming to Rome was to obtain a triumph, which certainly should not be accorded him. Baraldi thought that Lamennais should be received kindly, and some of his views approved. But his ideas on the sovereignty of the people were really subversive of the Church and of society, and he should be made realize and understand this. It will be observed that the first and third reply are quite sympathetic to their object. Only in the second is there any trace of severity, and that of a purely negative kind, because there is no question of condemnation, but the simple refusal of an answer. Nor was the Pope severe or autocratic. He simply suspended sentence for the time being, and said that after full and deliberate examination he would transmit his wishes to them. The Pontiff's

¹¹ LACORDAIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 43. FOISSET, *Vie de Lacordaire*, Vol. I., p. 196 seq.

¹² *Lamennais et le Saint Siège*.

course seems to have been perfectly prudent, reasonable and paternal as well; for had he hearkened to certain messages reaching him from France, there would not have been an instant's delay in his condemnation. Lacordaire understood at once that the cause was lost, and that the Pope was intimating to them as gently as possible a tacit disapproval. Lamennais obstinately closed his eyes to evidence, and announced his determination of staying in Rome to await a decision. The former left Rome March 15, 1832. The latter in the vain hope of obtaining a favorable decision stayed on in the city till July. Then wearying of the long and fruitless delay, embittered by his failure, indignant at the defection of Lacordaire, and considerably embarrassed by a heavy financial loss¹³ he left for home with revolt in his heart, and with the full determination of republishing the *Avenir*. At Munich he met Lacordaire and gave him a chilling reception. But the former was not to be abashed so easily. They began to chat, and for two hours, says Lacordaire, "I strove to show him how vain was his hope of resuming the *Avenir*, and what irreparable injury he would thereby cause to his intelligence, his faith and honor. At last, whether it was that my reasoning had convinced him, or the wider gulf now parting us had made an impression on him, he said to me: 'Yes, that is true, your viewpoint is the right one.'"¹⁴ The very next day a banquet was tendered to Lamennais by the *elite* of Munich. And strange and ironic to relate, it was during the very course of this entertainment that the papal brief of condemnation *Mirari vos* was handed to him. He received the fatal missive with a calmness quite unusual in him. "I have just received," he whispered to his companions, "a letter from the Pope against us; we must not hesitate to submit." On reaching France he immediately published in conjunction with his co-workers a declaration of submission. This attitude on the part of Lamennais gave deep satisfaction at Rome, and Cardinal Pacca wrote him a letter of congratulation on behalf of the Pope. The incident seemed safely closed, and would in all probability have ended there, if others had imitated the charity and prudent reserve

¹³ MOURRET, *La Question du libéralisme in the Cath., Rev. d'apol.*, 15 fév. 1917, p. 600.

¹⁴ LACORDAIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

shown by the Pope himself. Neither Lamennais nor his paper were mentioned in the Papal Brief, and even the errors condemned in the encyclical were not textually those of the paper, but rather the deductions and consequences towards which those doctrines tended. Friends and enemies began to comment noisily on the Papal letter, and each party saw in it what suited their own views. Friends and enemies began to stir up an agitation around Lamennais, and unfortunately he was not the man who would ever be satisfied to leave to others the last word. A further letter of the Pope's in reply to some fresh communications from France found its way quite unnecessarily into the newspapers.¹⁵ The Gallican press was not averse from paying off some old scores to its great antagonist. It twisted then the Brief into containing a direct allusion to Lamennais, and he was loudly called upon to submit unconditionally or explain his position. The journalists kept harping on the note that Lamennais had hitherto shown an entirely negative submission; that he had merely kept silent and dropped all polemics, but he had not given, so to speak, any hostages for his future good behavior, and he had not given his adhesion *ex animo* to the pontifical directions. These attacks were not without producing an effect. Soon there arrived to Lamennais a letter from Cardinal Pacca stating that his submission was not considered sufficient, and asking him to give a simple and unqualified adherence to the teaching of the encyclical. He obeyed. But his obedience was purely verbal, for all the while his soul was seething with revolt. In a letter written to Montalembert on January 1, 1834, he told his correspondent that for peace' sake he was prepared to sign anything, "even the statement that the Pope is God, the great God of heaven and earth, and that he alone ought to be adored." It was a sad New Year's letter, deplorable, regrettable, from every point of view; and a thousand times more so, when one remembers it was written to a mere boy, by an elderly priest, who not long before had been hailed as a Father of the Church. Lamennais had shortly before the above date ceased to celebrate mass, and he never afterwards discharged any priestly function. Some four months later, in April, 1834, appeared his *Paroles d'un*

¹⁵ FOISSET, *Vie du P. Lacordaire*, Vol. I., p. 238, says: La publicité donnée au Bref....n'était point un acte de bienveillance.

Croyant, into which he poured all the concentrated venom of his ulcerated heart. Some beautiful passages on prayer, pity, virtue offer no excuse for his furious declamations against the rulers of the day, and still less for a most offensive and unpardonable portrait of Gregory XVI. This paragraph was replaced by dots in the first edition, but he allowed it to appear in subsequent issues. The remainder of Lamennais' sad story may be told briefly. *Affaires de Rome*, published in 1836, was another furious invective against the Papacy. *Le pays et le gouvernement* gave such deep offense to the French Executive that Lamennais was condemned to a month's imprisonment. He spent his closing years in poverty and unhappiness, drifting restlessly from lodging to lodging in Paris. Mentally he seems to have gravitated more and more towards a vague pantheism. He died February 27, 1854. The previous day his niece observing he was extremely ill, said to him: "Feli, (i. e., the pet name he was always called by his intimates) "won't you have a priest? You would like to have a priest, wouldn't you?" "No!" "Do, I beg you." "No, no, no! Leave me alone." Then for eight hours he was unable to speak, but his mind seemed quite clear. Several times he endeavored to convey his wishes to those present, but they could not understand his incoherent mutterings. At last, growing weary of the unavailing effort to make himself understood, he turned his head to the wall, and shortly after breathed his last.

Years after when the smoke of battle had long cleared away, and when the evening of life was closing on himself, Lacordaire in two long letters to his friend Foisset, gave his considered judgments on the events here narrated. The great Dominican's noble character and spotless career are absolute guarantees of the impartiality, sincerity and careful discrimination of his observations. Questioned by Foisset as to the intellectual gifts of Lamennais, Lacordaire answered that Lamennais' intelligence was narrow, incapable of seeing an object in various lights, or of viewing it under different angles. Hence Lamennais most unreasonably thought that condemnation on certain points meant absolute ruin to him. The reason of a child, Lacordaire adds, would have overcome a difficulty where his met with shipwreck, and he failed through weakness, not through strength—and through weakness that a seminarian would not have been guilty of. My firm conviction, Lacordaire continues, is that Gregory

XVI wanted to save Lamennais, and that the Pope never would have condemned him, if he had simply thanked Cardinal Pacca for his letter, left Rome, and gone back quietly to Chenaie. If in 1832, Lamennais had been humble and submissive, or even merely clever and far-seeing, he would have found himself in 1841, the leader again of the Catholic liberal school. But he ruined himself like a child owing both to the lack of pliancy in his mind and his disobedience to the successor of St. Peter. Never did any one perish more unnecessarily, and nothing could show more conclusively how far short he fell from being a Christian genius or even the successful captain of an army.

A few days after Lamennais' death, Father Gratry happened to be preaching at the Oratory in Paris. "Must we despair," he asked of the salvation of "his poor soul? No. In order that this striking example might teach a lesson, God permitted that his passing should appear without hope. Still he had done much for the upbuilding of religion in our country. May we not then feel that, unknown to us, he turned again to the fold, and that mercy was granted to him?" These words would seem to voice accurately the dispositions of every noble soul.

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¹⁶ LACORDAIRE, *Lettres à Theophile Foisset*, Vol. II., pp. 227 seqq.